



South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



NATIONAL MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH

At the encouragement of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and the South Dakota Department of the Military, Gov. Dennis Daugaard has proclaimed May as "National Military Appreciation Month," a time for all to honor, remember, recognize and appreciate those who have served in the past and those now serving, as well as their families.

"The vigilance of the members of the Armed Forces has been instrumental to the preservation of freedom, security and prosperity enjoyed by the people of this great nation," the Governor's proclamation states. "The success of the Armed Forces depends on the dedicated service of its members and their families."

National Military Appreciation Month includes: Loyalty Day on May 1, Victory in Europe Day on May 8, Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 12, Armed Forces Day on May 20 and Memorial Day on May 29.

"It is certainly fitting to dedicate a month to consider all of the ways that members of our armed forces both past and present have earned and preserved our American way of life," said Adjutant General Timothy Reisch, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of the Military. "We also honor in a special way, the many contributions and tremendous support of our military family members without whom our service would be impossible."

The days provide an opportunity to honor, remember, recognize, and appreciate those who serve and have served. These men and women continue to play a major role in the development of our country documented through a history of uncompromising honor, dedication to duty and genuine love of country, according to South Dakota Veterans Affairs Secretary Larry Zimmerman.

"The month of May provides a great opportunity to remember, honor and pay tribute to our nation's heroes – heroes who set aside their personal safety to defend and protect their family, their community and their nation from those who would threaten our way of life," said Zimmerman. "These men and women step forward every day to train, fight and defend our freedoms."

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MEADE COUNTY COMMISSION NAME JOHNSON VETERAN OF THE MONTH

SDDVA Secretary Larry Zimmerman and Field Officer Will Huffman were on site yesterday when the Meade County Commission named their veteran of the month.

Brad Johnson (retired Air Force Chief Master Sergeant) was named April Meade County Veteran of the Month. He and his wife are holding the recognition plaques he was presented.



SDDVA DEPUTY SECRETARY POLLARD ASSISTED IN AWARDING SCHOLARSHIPS AT SDSU

This week South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA) Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard and Program Manager Erin Brown attended SDSU's recognition ceremony honoring the achievements of the Army and Air Force ROTC cadets.

Deputy Secretary Pollard and Jack Kempter from the Vietnam Veterans of America presented the Vietnam Veterans of America awards to Erin Holsclaw (Salem, NC) and Mitchell Selken (Brandon, SD).

"Events such as these highlight and reward the hard work and dedication of young patriots who strive to continue the rich history of Americans stepping up to answer the call and serve our nation in time of war, and in times of peace," said Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard. "In South Dakota we take this a step further and truly honor those who serve, as well as those who are considering military service while they work to further their educations."



VA MODERNIZATION INITIATIVE REDUCES PROCESSING TIME FOR VETERANS CLAIMS, SAVES FUTURE TAXPAYER DOLLARS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently started digitizing older, inactive paper records, which will save taxpayer dollars through reduced, leased office-space that currently houses these records.

This new “paper-extraction” process ensures that when a claim is filed, the veteran’s electronic record is already available in the VA’s computer systems, reducing processing time for benefit claims from veterans and their survivors. In the past, when a veteran filed a new or supplemental claim, if a medical condition had worsened, the retired paper files were boxed and shipped to a central site to scan into the VA’s systems before work would begin on the new claim.

Nearly two million inactive files were housed in 33 regional offices across the country before the change. As of April 14, more than 500,000 files have been collected from eight regional offices for scanning. Once the records have been digitized, the VA will archive and store them in less expensive long-term storage for safekeeping. The agency plans to remove and scan paper claim records from the remaining regional offices by the end of 2018.

Over the past five years, the VA has made concerted efforts to modernize the way it processes compensation and pension claims. Since 2012, 397 million records — consisting of 2.6 billion images — have been scanned, indexed and uploaded into the agency’s electronic-claims processing system, Veterans Benefits Management System. In fiscal 2016, the VA provided compensation and pension benefits to more than 5.1 million veterans and family members, totaling over \$80 billion.

In 2016, the VA implemented three new programs to enhance the time it takes to process a claim and SDDVA is utilizing all three of these resources. Digits to Digits and the Direct Upload Tool to allow our staff to electronically file claims straight to the VA. This reduces the need to scan documents at a third party vendor saving 10-30 days of claims processing time. The National Work Que was developed and implemented to enhance the timeliness in which claims are processed for veterans nationally. This has created a reduction in the amount of time it takes to complete a claim on a national level.

TRAVELING THE STATE SECRETARY ZIMMERMAN LOVES THE OPPORTUNITY TO THANK VETERANS

This week while traveling the state, SDDVA Secretary Zimmerman had the opportunity to thank two more Vietnam Veterans and welcome them home. He presented each of them with the commemorative Vietnam Veteran pin.

“The best part of my job is being afforded the opportunity to thank all of the men and women that signed that blank check to serve this great country, said SDDVA Secretary Larry Zimmerman. “They should hear that big ‘thank you’ everyday.”



SD ARMY NATIONAL GUARD NAMES SOLDIER NCO OF THE YEAR

The South Dakota Army National Guard took four enlisted soldiers and four non-commissioned officers to Yankton, April 20-22, to compete in the state's Best Warrior Competition, which names the soldier and non-commissioned officer of the year, respectively. After the three-day competition, Staff Sgt. Shane Wilkinson, with Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery, was named the 2017 SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year and Spc. Lucas Scott, 842nd Engineer Company, the SDARNG Soldier of the Year.

Day one of the competition began with a very brief welcome from Hoekman, a quick shakedown and inspection, and competitors were soon taking the Army physical fitness test, comprised of push-ups, sit-ups and a two-mile run. Following the APFT, soldiers took an exam on map reading, grid coordinates and terrain association. After handing in their exams, they changed into the Army service uniform for an interview board comprised of four command sergeants major, a uniform inspection and a proficiency test on drill and ceremony.

The following day began at dark, with a night land-navigation test, a timed ruck march, and once the sun had risen, a daytime land-navigation course. Various stations followed, designed to test warrior tasks and battle drills, such as the ability to evaluate and treat a casualty, to set up radio

communications and request medical evacuation, vehicle maintenance, knowledge and proficiency on various weapons systems and reacting to chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and/or explosive materials.

The third day of the competition included an essay and exam.

Wilkinson and Scott will move on to the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition next month at Fort Lewis, Washington, where they will represent the SDARNG against soldiers from Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and North Dakota.

Joining Scott in the Soldier of the Year competition were Spc. Derek Kocer, Company B, 139th Brigade Support Battalion, the 2017 Soldier of the Year runner-up/alternate; Spc. Brianna Bohn, 740th Transportation Company; and Spc. Elijah Houchens, Company C, 189th Aviation Battalion.

Wilkinson's fellow NCOs in the competition were Sgt. Austin Pearce, 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, the 2017 NCO of the Year runner-up/alternate; Sgt. 1st Class Cindy Erickson, 1st Battalion, 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute); and Staff Sgt. Thomas Wanzek, Joint Force Headquarters.

While Wilkinson and Scott will move on to represent South Dakota in the regional competition, and potentially nationally, it was the year leading up to the competition that ultimately affects the organization as a whole.



Wilkinson, receiving the award from State Command Sgt. Maj. James Hoekman



Scott, receiving the award from State Command Sgt. Maj. James Hoekman

POLLARD WELCOMES NATIONAL AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY PRESIDENT TO SD

This week, SDDVA Deputy Secretary Pollard was one of many that welcomed National American Legion Auxiliary President Mary Davis to South Dakota.

During his remarks, Pollard thanked the Auxiliary for all that they do for our veterans, their families, and the communities in which they serve. Pollard reviewed the accomplishments that had been achieved by the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and the partners that work with the Department. Pollard noted accomplishments such as those would be impossible without a team of individuals who are willing to answer the call to serve. He then referenced a book by Dr. Robert McNeish called "Lessons from Geese." This book provides a perfect example of the importance of partnerships and how they can have a profound and powerful effect. When we use these five principles we foster and encourage energy in ourselves, as well as our partners.

Lesson 1 - The Importance of Achieving Goals—Geese band together and fly as a collective V. By flying in a 'V' formation the whole flock adds 71 percent extra to their flying range. When we have a sense of community and focus, we create trust and can help each other to achieve our goals. We cannot do this alone – we need the insights, instincts, collaboration, partnership, and alliance of everyone to improve the lives of our veterans and their families.

Lesson 2 - The Importance of Team Work—When a goose falls out of formation it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves back to take advantage of the lifting power of the team. Staying in formation with those headed where we want to go will ensure mutual success. We need to accept help and give our help to others. We need to ensure that veterans are not slipping through the seams within our comprehensive system of care, benefits, and services. We need to ensure that veterans experience as seamless a transition as possible from uniformed service to reintegration into their communities.

Lesson 3 - The Importance of Sharing—When a goose tires of flying up front it drops back into formation and another goose flies to the point position. It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks. We should respect and protect each other's unique arrangement of skills, capabilities, talents and resources.

Lesson 4 - The Importance of Empathy and Understanding -When a goose gets sick, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to the ground to help and protect it. We must stand by each other in difficult times, as well as when we are strong. South Dakota is home to 75,000 veterans. Partnerships with groups like the American Legion and the Auxiliaries are an integral part of helping us reach our veterans and those that love them and suffer alongside of them. It is important that we all work together to connect our veterans to the right programs, resources, and benefits. The men and women who have worn the uniform deserve our loyalty and respect for all that we ask them and their families to bear in the name of the American people.

Lesson 5 - The Importance of Encouragement—Geese flying in formation 'HONK' to encourage those up front to keep up with their speed. We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups and teams where there is encouragement, production is much greater.

Pollard closed his comments noting, like the geese, we must all continue to fly in formation and work together to achieve our shared goal of helping those who were willing to offer so much!



SDNG SELECTS LIEUTENANT OF THE YEAR

The South Dakota National Guard selected a Harrisburg man as Lieutenant of the Year during its annual officer's conference in Deadwood, April 21.

Capt. Ross Rollinger, commander of the 114th Maintenance Operations Flight, South Dakota Air National Guard, received the Lt. Col. John J. Steele Award as the most exceptional lieutenant after competing against lieutenants from several of the SDNG's major commands.

Rollinger, who has more than 11 years of service in the Air National Guard, enlisted in 2006 as a jet engine mechanic in the 114th Maintenance Squadron. He deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and served at Balad Air Base in 2008 and 2010 maintaining jet engines.

By March 2013, he received his commission as a second lieutenant through the Academy of Military Science and later that year attended the Accelerated Aircraft Maintenance Officer's course at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas.

As the flight commander for the 114th Maintenance Operations Flight, he is responsible for maintaining a fleet of 22 F-16 Block 40 aircraft at Joe Foss Field and four at the Aerospace Control Alert Detachment at March Air Reserve Base in California.

In addition to his responsibilities in the Air National Guard, Rollinger is the assistant principal at Harrisburg North Middle School.

In 2006, he graduated from South Dakota State University with a Bachelor of Science in History, with an emphasis on middle and high school education, and in 2014 from the University of South Dakota, with a Master of Arts in Education Administration.

He has spent over a decade teaching and coaching the youth of South Dakota in three different school systems.

Other officers representing their major command for this year's award competition were 1st Lt. Trevor Reisch, 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, and 1st Lt. Joelle Mulder, 109th Regional Support Group.

"Just to be able to represent the 114th Fighter Wing was a great honor," said Rollinger. "Receiving the actual title certainly added to that feeling."

"I love being a part of the National Guard family and tradition of success," Rollinger added. "I look forward to broadening my leadership skills and working with all National Guard members to ensure we fulfill our state and federal missions."

The Lt. Col. John J. Steele Award was established in 1968 to annually recognize the most outstanding lieutenant in the South Dakota National Guard. Selection is based on exceptional qualities of leadership, values and performance.



SDNG SELECTS WARRANT OFFICER OF THE YEAR

The South Dakota National Guard selected a Rapid City man as Warrant Officer of the Year during its annual officer's conference in Deadwood, April 21.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 James Fleming, education and incentives branch chief for Joint Force Headquarters, South Dakota Army National Guard, received the Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael F. O'Connor Award as the most exceptional warrant officer after competing against warrant officers from several of the SDARNG's major commands.

"To receive this award is very humbling and would not have been a consideration without the dedication and hard work of those on the support teams surrounding me at work or at home," said Fleming. "It has to be said that being nominated for an award named after an individual known for his fully engaged support of his fellow Soldiers is inspiring and uplifting."

Fleming, who has 29 years of military service, is the senior advisor to the SDARNG director of personnel and unit commanders on all concerns related to National Guard educational funding and incentives, initiatives and programs. He was also the runner-up for the 2016 Technician of the Year Award for the SDNG.

"I truly enjoy helping my fellow soldiers discover how they can reach their post-secondary educational goals," said Fleming. "The men and women of the South Dakota Army National Guard deserve the best we can give them and being a small part of aiding them is extremely rewarding."

In addition to his full-time responsibilities, Fleming also volunteers much of his free time to local organizations. He has been a foster parent with the S.D. Dept. of Social Services for 13 years, a member of the American Legion Post 22, a volunteer at his church and a member of the Black Hills Society of Human Resources.

Other warrant officers representing their major command for this year's competition were Chief Warrant Officer 2 Tyler Ehnes, 109th Regional Support Group, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ryan Peterson, 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.

The CW4 Michael F. O'Connor Award was established in 2000 to recognize the most outstanding South Dakota Army National Guard Warrant Officer of the past year. Criterion for the award is based on exceptional qualities of technical knowledge, leadership, dedication, and initiative.



US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ANNOUNCES HIRING-FREEZE CHANGES

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced an update to its hiring-freeze guidelines for the Department.

Effectively immediately, hiring restrictions are removed for the Veterans Health Administration's medical facilities; for medical and non-medical positions; and for Veterans Benefits Administration regional and field offices. The VA's National Cemetery Administration had no restrictions, and this remains unchanged.

However, in order to streamline VA's corporate structure and administrative positions, the VA will maintain a process that requires thorough review before hiring. Hiring in the administrations must have the appropriate Under Secretary level approval; and at the VA's Central Office, the Chief of Staff must approve.



COMING TO SOUTH DAKOTA

Watch for the Purple Heart Run truck to hit South Dakota in July! Tentative schedule shows the truck hitting Sioux Falls on July 18th with a ceremony on the morning of the 19th. After the ceremony in Sioux Falls, the truck will head west to Rapid City for a ceremony on the 20th of July.

The Purple Heart Run truck will be traveling from the country starting in Washington, DC June 28 and ending its journey in Dallas, TX on August 13 at the Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention.



Upcoming Events

Apr 28-30—DAV Annual Convention—AmericInn—Fort Pierre

May 5-6 Veterans Day and Howard Wood Relays

May 6—Military Order of the Purple Heart Convention—Rapid City Howard Johnson—10:00 am (MT)

May 12—Improving Combat Veterans Care—Sioux Falls University Center

Jun 10—SD Marine Corps League Annual Meeting—Pierre Post 8 (520 W. Pierre Street) - 10:00 am (CT)

Jun 15-18—SD American Legion State Conference—Watertown—Ramkota

Jun 22-25—State VFW Convention—Pierre—Ramkota

Aug 14-17—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Pierre—Ramkota

Here's
What's
Happening!

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